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ZNR UUUUU ZZH(CCY ADX0074C186 MSI3819)
P 261815Z MAR 08 ZDS
FM AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0383
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHC/DEPT OF LABOR WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUCNFB/DIRFBI WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS SANTO DOMINGO 000414

SIPDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y - SENSITIVE CAPTION ADDED

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CAR

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [ELAB](#) [PGOV](#) [DR](#)

SUBJECT: MEDICAL DOCTORS AND OTHER GROUPS CALL FOR MORE STRIKES

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Dominican Doctors Union (CMD) organized a march to the Presidential palace on Wednesday, March 12, to demand a salary increase for medical doctors employed by the state. However, the press reported the National Police aided by the National Investigation Department (DNI) dispersed the non-violent marchers using batons, pepper spray, tear gas, water cannons, and by firing their guns in to the air, actions denounced by a number of NGO and political parties as excessive use of force. The CMD has called for a third general stoppage of medical services from March 26-28. The CMD strike and calls for a general strike by other social movement groups and transportation organizations in April indicate increased activity by leftist groups and others in the lead up to the May 16 presidential election. End Summary.

¶2. (U) In a meeting with PolOff, leaders of the CMD stated one their demands is a salary increase from approximately USD 676 dollars to USD 1,735 dollars monthly. They stated that the last salary increase was a fifteen percent increase three years ago. On March 5, the CMD, seeking an audience with President Fernandez, informed the Minister of Interior and Police that they planned to march to the National Palace on Mexico Avenue. The CMD and Media sources reported that despite the non-violent nature of the march, the National Police chose to disperse the marchers a few blocks before the National Palace by dousing them with water and pepper spray, hitting them with batons, discharging their firearms in the air and releasing teargas. The CMD also alleged the police used sewage water to disperse the crowd, causing vomiting, diarrhea, and skin irritation. Police sources admitted that the police did not completely follow proper crowd control procedures; however, they dispute the allegations of use of pepper spray and sewage water as well as discharge of firearms in the air.

¶3. (U) The press reported that in addition to the CMD, the Alternative Social Forum (FSA), a leftist social movement group, the Transportation Union (FENATRANO), and various teacher and student groups also joined the march. According to Waldo Ariel Suero, president of CMD, historically other social groups join together in protest to bring more attention to their issues and to show solidarity. He added that there is strength in numbers which diminishes the chance for government repression.

¶4. (U) The CMD has already undertaken two strikes to date, one in February and the one last week. In addition, they are calling for another strike from March 26) 27. Some experts claim this strike could affect as many as 90,000 patients,

many of whom are poor. Transportation organizations and popular social movement groups are also calling for a general strike April 9.

15. (U) The Secretary of Public Health and Social Assistance (SESPAS), Bautista Rojas Gomez, called for doctors affiliated with the Dominican Liberation Party (PLD) to support the current government and president and to ignore the call for a strike next week. Ariel characterized the strike as violating the rules of the CMD and politicizing their struggle. The CMD has member doctors from all political affiliations, including Rojas himself. On March 25, the press reported that more than a thousand doctors publicly signed a document refusing to participate in the strike and called on Ariel to stop all strikes and marches during this election period as it "contaminates politically the doctor's demands." Rojas accused the PRD of being behind the strikes and announced that SESPAS will not meet with CMD to discuss their demands until after the May elections. Jose Rodriguez Aybar, a Sub-secretary from SESPAS, stated "we strongly urge the PRD candidate to remove his hands from the CMD."

16. (U) On March 26, Ariel told PolOff that the strike commenced and is going as planned with PLD doctors participating, despite their declarations the day before that they will not participate. The strike is planned for seventy-two hours. The CMD is also planning a vigil in Santo Domingo on April 2 and a march in Santiago on April 3.

17. (U) Comment: The government's violent reaction to the march and its limited engagement of the CMD is explained by the ruling PLD party's belief that the opposition PRD party is supporting the CMD strike actions as part of the PRD campaign strategy. The PLD alleges that the PRD is coordinating action with social groups, including the FSA, to foment unrest, disturbances and strikes. In the highly partisan atmosphere of an election campaign, the GODR is also

highly sensitive to any event that calls attention to the rising cost of living in the DR. The Minister of Health's statements and the disproportionate police response to the march gave the event more visibility than it might have, a rare tactical error by the Fernandez government in the run up to the May 16 presidential election. End Comment.
FANNIN